

## IOAN LĂCĂTUȘU, “ROMANIANS IN THE HUNGARIAN MASS-MEDIA FROM HARGHITA AND COVASNA COUNTIES (2006–2009)”. BOOK PRESENTATION

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### ABSTRACT

*In the Covasna and Harghita counties, which are in the centre of Romania, ethnic Romanians and Hungarians have been interacting for hundreds of years. The social logic according to which these two ethnic groups interact is based on the fact that the latter is a dominant minority and the former a dominated majority. Professor Ioan Lăcătușu’s work details the presence of this social logic in the Hungarian language press. How does the Hungarian-language mass media portray the history of the Romanians, the activity of the Orthodox Diocese of Covasna and Harghita – the main institution supporting the Romanian identity of the two counties – and the situation of the Roman Catholic Romanians in Moldova? In this book presentation, the answer to the first question will be dealt with, since most elements of the Hungarian discourse can be discovered by observing how the history of the Romanians is mirrored in the Hungarian language press of the two counties. Mr. Ioan Lăcătușu brings to the attention of the general public unfamiliar with the ethnic tension in the area, whether they are ordinary citizens, political decision-makers or state dignitaries, the problems faced by the Romanian minority in the two counties shortly after Romania joined the European Union (2007) and intensified its cooperation relations with Hungary. Also, the publication of a book on the activity of the Hungarian-language press in Romania took place when in the two counties there were intensified efforts to obtain territorial autonomy for the so-called “Szeklerland”.*

**Keywords:** minority Romanians in Romania, Hungarian minority in Romania, media, interethnic relations.

Professor Ioan Lăcătușu is one of the leading figures of the numerical minority Romanians in Covasna and Harghita counties. Archivist and sociologist, Mr. Ioan Lăcătușu is one of the founders of organizations that campaign for the preservation of Romanian identity in the Intracarpadian Arc<sup>443</sup>. The 30 years of his work have

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<sup>443</sup> Oana Mălina Negrea, “Români cu povești/Cercetătorul Ioan Lăcătușu lasă o valoroasă moștenire culturii românești și generațiilor viitoare” [“Romanians with stories/Researcher Ioan Lăcătușu is leaving a precious legacy for Romanian culture and future generations”], December 1, 2022, in *Agerpress*, Available at: <https://www.agerpres.ro/cultura-media/2022/12/01/romani-cupovesticercetatorul>

been crowned by the publication of numerous scientific works concerning both the past and the present of the Romanian community in this area<sup>444</sup>, of which it is worth mentioning that he is the author of the first monograph of the Romanians in St. Gheorghe<sup>445</sup>.

The book was published by Eurocarpatica Publishing House, a publishing house working under the guidance of the Covasna-Harghita European Studies Centre. This research centre has been working since 1999 for developing civil society in Covasna and Harghita counties and for the promotion of humanist ideas in the two counties through research in the fields of sociology, geopolitics, history, theology, economics and political science, but not only<sup>446</sup>.

Professor Ioan Lăcătușu was an expert who monitored the public discourse and behaviour of Hungarian leaders in Covasna and Harghita counties on issues related to interethnic coexistence between 2001 and 2004<sup>447</sup>, with the support of the Ministry of Public Information. Publishing the first and second volumes of the book, the Romanian sociologist and archivist carried on the project without the support of the Romanian Government.

Compared to previous efforts to monitor the Hungarian press, the book has the merit of bringing to the readers' attention the changes in the discourse of the Hungarian press regarding the minority Romanians in the area after Romania and Hungary became members of the European Union (2007). Professor Ioan Lăcătușu's book is also a part of the Romanian reaction to counter autonomist tendencies, a reaction that also found expression in another work by the same author in 2008 – "Arguments against the ethnic-based autonomy of the so-called 'Szeklerland'"<sup>448</sup>.

In over 200 pages, Professor Ioan Lăcătușu's work begins with an analysis of the Hungarian press and ends with an annexed presentation of the efforts of the

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<sup>444</sup> Among the works Mr. Lăcătușu has written are:

1. Ioan Lăcătușu, *Spiritualitate românească și conviețuire interetnică în Covasna și Harghita [Romanian spirituality and interethnic coexistence in Covasna and Harghita]*, St. Gheorghe, Eurocarpatica Publishing House, 2002.

2. Ioan Lăcătușu, *Argumente împotriva autonomiei pe criterii etnice a așa-zisului "Ținut secuiesc"* [Arguments against ethnic autonomy of the so-called "Szeklerland"], St. Gheorghe, Eurocarpatica Publishing House, 2008.

<sup>445</sup> Oana Mălina Negrea, "Români cu povești/Cercetătorul Ioan Lăcătușu lasă o valoroasă moștenire culturii românești și generațiilor viitoare" ["Romanians with stories/Researcher Ioan Lăcătușu is leaving a precious legacy for Romanian culture and future generations"], December 1, 2022, in *Agerpress*, Available at: <https://www.agerpres.ro/cultura/media/2022/12/01/romani-cupovesticercetatorulioanlacatusulasa ovaloroasa mostenire-culturii-romanestisigeneratiilorviitoare1023023>, Accessed on September 11, 2022.

<sup>446</sup> Ioan Lăcătușu, *Românii în mass-media maghiară din Harghita și Covasna [Romanians in the hungarian mass-media from Harghita and Covasna counties]*, Vol. II, St. Gheorghe, Eurocarpatica Publishing House, 2009, p. 4.

<sup>447</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>448</sup> See Ioan Lăcătușu, *op. cit.*, 2008.

Romanian community in Covasna and Harghita to preserve their identity. The reader unfamiliar with Romanian problems in the area has the opportunity to know them in a short time by reading a single book. The annexes provide the context (some of the concrete problems faced by Romanians in the two counties) in which the Hungarian press writes about numerically minority Romanians.

Ioan Lăcătușu presented his book to the interested public on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Covasna-Harghita European Studies Centre, thus representing a new proof of the efforts made by the group of researchers within the centre to support the Romanian minorities in the two counties<sup>449</sup>.

This review focuses on how the history of Romanians is reflected in the pages of the Hungarian press.

### **THEMES OF ROMANIAN HISTORY IN THE HUNGARIAN LANGUAGE PRESS IN COVASNA AND HARGHITA COUNTIES**

It is no coincidence that the first chapter of the book begins with the way the Hungarian-language press in the two counties exposed the Romanian history. The events of the past are a rich source of arguments, which form the basis of present and future actions taken by an ethnic group. The Bucharest School of Sociology, founded by Dimitrie Gusti, clarified the problem of the organic connection between past and future by formulating the law of sociological parallelism<sup>450</sup>.

Social units (families, villages, ethnic groups, nations) manifest themselves continuously, i.e. through their action, they update social (psychological and historical) and asocial (cosmic and biological) frameworks. For the various social units, the frameworks represent justifications, incentives, even simple reasons for future actions.

Mr. Ioan Lăcătușu demonstrated that between 2006 and 2009 the number of articles in the Hungarian press was aiming to justify the autonomy of the so-called “Szeklerland” increased. In other words, journalists justified the future actions of the Hungarian community in the two counties using arguments specific to the historical frame to a greater extent than those of cosmological, biological or psychological nature.

“In the Hungarian-language press, the glorious history of the Szeklers is extolled as an argument for nostalgic approaches, and those with a message of self-victimization

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<sup>449</sup> Covasna Media, “Dublă prezentare de carte și 10 ani de la înființarea Centrului European de Studii Covasna – Harghita” [“A double book presentation and 10 years since the foundation of the Covasna – Harghita European Study Centre”], December 17, 2009, Available at: <https://covanamedia.ro/actualitate/dubla-prezentare-de-carte-si-10-anidelainfiintarea-centrului-european-de-studii-covasna-%E2%80%93-harghita>, Accessed on September 11, 2022.

<sup>450</sup> Ion Ungureanu, *Paradigme ale cunoașterii societății* [The paradigms of society knowledge], Iași, Junimea Publishing House, 2002, p. 111, apud Dimitrie Gusti, *Pagini alese* [Selected pages], Bucharest, Scientific Publishing House, 1965, pp. 117–118.

and revisionism; it is advocated the reactualization of the traditional administrative organization, by Szekler seats, without taking into account that these structures corresponded to a certain historical period, today they are obsolete, a fact proven by their dismantling, for reasons related to the modernization of the administration, in 1785, 1849, and definitively in 1876; during the Austro-Hungarian dualism”<sup>451</sup>.

How did the Hungarian-language press expose the history of the Romanians to readers?

It should be mentioned at the outset that the discourse constructed by the Hungarian press contributes to deepening interethnic disputes, perpetuating tensions in the area. Why? For the simple reason that the moments of mutual support between the Romanians, Hungarians and Szeklers are omitted. Also, the history of the Romanians is rarely told through the prism of Romanian authors and the version taught in Romanian schools.

The lack of the Romanian version leaves room for a narrative of Romanian history in accordance with the social logic of the dominant minority and the dominated minority. The importance of personalities such as Mihai Viteazu and Avram Iancu is minimised, and significant moments in Romanian history such as the “Great Union” (1918) and the liberation of Northern Transylvania from Horthyist occupation between 1940 and 1944 are regretted.

Professor Ioan Lăcătușu’s work stands as proof that the Romanian state guarantees the right to free expression for the Hungarian minority in Romania, as it allows the publication of articles denigrating the history of Romanians. However, the Hungarian intelligentsia and the press of Hungarian interests are keen to reinforce the “linguistic ghetto” in which they find themselves. Despite the guarantee of the right to free expression, the dominant minority’s press agencies negatively label significant moments in Romanian history. The author discovered the existence of expressions such as “invented [Romanian] historical past”<sup>452</sup>, “Romanian soldiers, invaders”<sup>453</sup>, “1 December is a day of grief for Hungarians”<sup>454</sup> și “Transylvania as a gift to a foreign country in 1920”<sup>455</sup>.

The negative labelling of the history of Romanians can be seen in relation to the Treaty of Trianon, signed by Romania and Hungary in 1920, which recognised

<sup>451</sup> Ioan Lăcătușu, *op. cit.*, 2009, p. 101.

<sup>452</sup> Kádár Gyula, “Mesajul istoriei Transilvaniei” [“The message of Transylvanian history”], in *Szekely Hirmondo*, 29/2009, pp. 24-30, apud *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>453</sup> Kolumbán Sándor, “Ce să sărbătorească?” [“What to celebrate?”], in *Europai-Ido*, no. 24/2007, apud *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>454</sup> Kádár Gyula, “1 decembrie și autodeterminarea” [“1 December and self-determination”], in *Hâromszek*, no. 5545/2008, apud *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>455</sup> Kádár Gyula, “Unde este patria secuinului?” [“Where is the homeland of the Szekler!”], in *Szekely Hirmondo*, no. 41/2007, apud *Ibid.*, p. 33.

the borders “Greater Romania”, called in the Hungarian press with names like “Trianon drama”:

“The greatest physical hit and the one inflicted on the Hungarians was on 4 June 1920. Eighty-six years ago, on this day in France, at the Trianon, the signing of the peace treaty with Hungary occurred, which ‘validated’ the annexation of Transylvania, Slovakia, Croatia and a strip of Western Hungary (...) The biggest ‘hug’ in the country’s body received Romania (...)”<sup>456</sup>.

“The Trianon problem” was presented, even after 2009, in a negative connotation by the Hungarian press. Even in the year of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the “Great Union” (2018), the Hungarian media continues to negatively label the event according to a recent study<sup>457</sup>.

In the Hungarian press, the Romanian community is not represented as if it were a numerical minority in the two counties, but as part of the majority nation. This perception makes it difficult to live with each other because the minority Romanians are labelled as responsible for the actions of the Romanian nation, which is perceived in the press as a source of discrimination against Hungarians. Paradoxically, the Hungarian press labels the minority Romanians in the two counties as responsible for the assimilation of the Hungarian community.

The massacres committed by the soldiers of Miklós Horthy’s regime after the occupation of Northern Transylvania in 1940, one of the tragic moments suffered also by the Romanians of the two counties, are also omitted by the Hungarian-language press of the two counties<sup>458</sup>.

Many articles try justifying the idea that ethnic Hungarians were assimilated, especially during the dictatorial regime established by Nicolae Ceaușescu (1964–1989). There have been many articles in which the gendarmerie barracks, the Orthodox monasteries and the numerous police forces deployed in the area<sup>459</sup> have been labelled as the actors responsible for assimilating. On the issue of assimilation, it should be noted that, contrary to the historical evidence of Hungarianisation state policies during the period of Austro-Hungarian dualism<sup>460</sup>, the Hungarian-language press tried to create the impression that there was, in fact, a “model of democracy”<sup>461</sup> on the territory of Transylvania.

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<sup>456</sup> „Cea mai mare lovitură fizică și spirituală aplicată maghiarilor a fost cea din 4 iunie 1920. În urmă cu 86 de ani, în această zi, în Franța, la Trianon a avut loc semnarea tratatului de pace cu Ungaria, care a «validat» anexarea Transilvaniei, Slovaciei, Croației și a unei fâșii din Ungaria de Vest (...) «Îmbucătura» cea mai mare din corpul țării a primit-o România (...)”, in *Ibid.*, pp. 68–69.

<sup>457</sup> See Radu Baltasiu, Ovidiana Bulumac and Alin Bulumac, “Elemente de conținut ale propagandei în anul Centenar” [“Elements of propaganda content in the Centenary year”], in *Etnosfera*, no. 2/2018, pp. 177–193.

<sup>458</sup> Ioan Lăcătușu, *op. cit.*, 2009, p. 101.

<sup>459</sup> See “Adunare generală de alegeri a asociației ceangăilor” [“General Election Meeting of the Association of Ceangas”], June 16, 2009, in *Háromszek*, apud *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>460</sup> See G. Badea-Lătuțeanu, *Problema Secuiască [The Szekler Issue]*, Bucharest, Eikon Publishing House, 2018.

<sup>461</sup> Ioan Lăcătușu, *op. cit.*, 2009, p. 101.

## RELEVANCE OF THE WORK UNDERTAKEN BY PROFESSOR IOAN LĂCĂTUȘU

“Romanians in the Hungarian media in Harghita and Covasna” is a book that “initiates” the general public in Romania on the issue of Romanian minorities in the two counties. For those who wish to deepen the subject, they can consult other works such as “The weakening of the Romanian community in Harghita-Covasna”, written by Romanian sociologists Radu Baltasiu, Ovidiana Bulumac, Gabriel Săpunaru<sup>462</sup> and “Forgotten in the heart of Romania: current aspects of Romanian-Hungarian coexistence in Covasna and Harghita counties”, a report by Dan Tanasă, journalist and member of the Romanian Parliament since 2020<sup>463</sup>.

Ioan Lăcătușu has the merit of removing the language barrier that makes it impossible for the public, Romanian state dignitaries and specialists to know the Hungarian discourse in Romania, concentrated mainly in the press of the two counties in the centre of the country. Indeed, this work can provide the basis for action to achieve a peaceful environment in the centre of Romania, which is so necessary between the two communities.

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<sup>462</sup> See Radu Baltasiu, Gabriel Săpunaru and Ovidiana Bulumac, *Slăbirea comunității românești din Harghita-Covasna: raport de cercetare [The weakening of the Romanian community in Harghita-Covasna: research report]*, Bucharest, Ethnological Publishing House, 2013.

<sup>463</sup> See Dan Tanasă, *Uitați în inima României: aspecte actuale ale conviețuirii româno-maghiare în județele Covasna și Harghita [Forgotten in the heart of Romania: current aspects of Romanian-Hungarian coexistence in Covasna and Harghita counties]*, St. Gheorghe, Eurocarpatica Publishing House, 2016.

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